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Implementation of the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General hereby transmits the report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on the implementation of the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade in accordance with General Assembly resolution 59/149 of 20 December 2004.

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Implementation of the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade

Report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Summary

In its resolution 56/116 of 19 December 2001, the General Assembly proclaimed the 10-year period beginning on 1 January 2003 the United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD). By its resolution 57/166 of 18 December 2002, it welcomed the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade. In its resolution 59/149 of 20 December 2004, the Assembly took note of the first progress report on implementation of the International Plan of Action and called for intensified, better coordinated and sustained action to ensure literacy for all age groups and populations. It called on UNESCO to reinforce its lead coordinating role and to seek the views of Member States on the progress achieved in implementing their national programmes and plans of action and to submit progress reports on the implementation of the International Plan of Action to the General Assembly on a biennial basis, beginning in 2006. The present report reviews the findings of a questionnaire sent to Member States, the literacy situation and commitments worldwide, and the actions of the United Nations partner agencies. It reviews the challenges that face UNESCO, as lead agency, and other partners in a changing United Nations system in pursuing the goals of the Literacy Decade.

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I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 56/116 of 19 December 2001, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the 10-year period beginning on 1 January 2003 the United Nations Literacy Decade. In its resolution 59/149 of 20 December 2004, the Assembly took note of the first progress report on implementation of the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade prepared in cooperation with the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (A/59/267). It appealed for intensified, better coordinated and sustained action to ensure literacy for all age groups and populations.

2. Above all, the General Assembly directed UNESCO to reinforce its lead coordinating role of stimulating the activities undertaken at the international level within the framework of the United Nations Literacy Decade so that they become complementary to other agreed development goals and the entire Education for All (EFA) process. It further called upon the Secretary-General, in cooperation with UNESCO, to seek the views of Member States on the progress achieved in implementing their national programmes and plans of action and to submit progress reports on the implementation of the International Plan of Action to the General Assembly on a biennial basis, beginning in 2006.

3. The present progress report for the period 2005-2006 is divided into several parts. It reviews the global literacy situation based on the latest data provided by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and the *EFA Global Monitoring Report: Literacy for Life, 2006*.[1] It examines the evolving international context and the relation between the Literacy Decade and other international education and development frameworks. It reports the findings of a questionnaire sent by the UNESCO Secretariat in December and February 2006 to Member States through their National Commissions for UNESCO or UNESCO field offices and to other United Nations agencies, a selected number of non-governmental organizations and several Literacy Decade international and regional resource persons. The progress report draws attention to challenges and the way forward. It reviews reports from some United Nations system agencies. It concludes with a consideration of the available tools to assess commitment and progress.

II. The literacy scene

4. The international community has been working for 60 years to promote literacy for all age groups through periods of varying commitment and utilizing a great diversity of strategies. The latest data on primary school enrolment and completion as well as youth and adult literacy worldwide are far from encouraging, however. While there has been steady progress at a global level since International Literacy Year 1990, as the data in tables 1 to 3 provided by UIS (April 2006) illustrate, there are great disparities across regions, within countries and within populations. Above all, countries and the international organizations committed to

[1] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *EFA Global Monitoring Report, Literacy for Life, 2006* (2005), UNESCO, Paris, available from http://portal.unesco.org/education.

the targets and goals of the Millennium Declaration, EFA and the Literacy Decade are not yet making the sustained efforts that are essential.

5. According to the latest UIS data (and individual country definitions of what constitutes literacy), there are 771 million adults over the age of 15 lacking basic literacy skills worldwide as of April 2006. These numbers are much greater if account is taken of youth between 15 and 24 years of age who have been denied the opportunity to learn or who have left school without completing a first school-leaving certificate. Underachievement, dropout and grade repetition are often contributory factors to lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills and competencies. Above all, for the past 20 years concern has focused on improving the quality of formal schooling as well as on increasing enrolments. The attention given to quality control for non-formal and second-chance youth and adult literacy provision has lagged far behind the attention accorded to the formal sector, however.

6. The *EFA Global Monitoring Report: Literacy for Life, 2006*[3] takes up these concerns systematically in its role of monitoring international commitment to the six EFA goals. Goal 4, which aims at achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, is the subject of the 2006 *Report*. After synthesizing the available research and policy literature on a full range of literacy and formal schooling issues, the *Report* recommends a three-pronged approach to renewing and sustaining commitment: (a) universal quality primary schooling; (b) national public commitment and expansion of adult literacy provision; and (c) systematic attention to ensuring a literate environment. The *Report* takes note of the recommendations of the background paper prepared for the EFA Working Group literacy session in July 2005.[4] This Working Group session was preparatory to one held during the fifth meeting of the High-Level Group on EFA, held in Beijing in November 2005. The Final Communique of the High-Level Group called upon Governments and EFA partners to demonstrate political commitment by integrating literacy into education sector plans, to give higher priority to literacy in formulating education budgets, and to develop sustainable literate environments. The communiqué also encouraged funding agencies to work with Governments to provide significant and regular funding and capacity development for effective literacy programmes.

7. Historically, formal education and access to literacy have only become internationally recognized human rights in fairly recent times, namely, since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its Article 26. Also, the growth and spread of literacy prior to the 1950s in the world was not necessarily causally linked to economic development. Sometimes, good literacy levels and levels of education preceded economic growth. In other instances, they followed industrialization but with a significant time lag. Often, migration and the nature of labour markets in newly industrializing areas had a negative impact on the availability of schooling and adult literacy. Today, however, basic literacy and numeracy for children and adults alike are recognized as vital for equitable and sustainable development.

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[4] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, "Literacy and Empowerment", background and issues paper prepared by Lesley Limage et al., for the Session on Literacy for Empowerment at the Working Group on Education for All (29 July 2005), available from http://www.unesco.org/education/efa.

8. Thus, it is now widely acknowledged that literate women are better able to care for themselves and their families and to participate in economic and social change in their societies. It is also clear that the expansion of primary schooling is not enough to ensure universal literacy in the youth and adult population. Existing school systems in all regions, to a greater or lesser degree, are plagued by wastage (dropout, underachievement, absenteeism, grade repetition) which, in fact, contributes to fragile or non-sustainable literacy skills. Existing non-formal adult literacy programmes or second-chance adult learning opportunities are rarely on a large enough scale or planned and financed in a sufficiently integrated and sustainable manner to respond effectively to the diversity of need and context.

9. Perhaps the two most basic considerations for the effectiveness of all learning are the language(s) of instruction and the availability of books and other print material (the literate environment). Children and adults alike learn most effectively in their first languages. National language policies are essentially political, however. Some countries have selected a single or dominant language as an official one to promote national unity and social cohesion or to ensure equality of opportunity. Others, especially federal states, consider that their national unity is best guaranteed by respect for their linguistic diversity. Policies on language in education at both school and adult non-formal levels are also a product of these larger political considerations. Meanwhile, with regard to literate environments, the availability of books and print materials is critical to sustainable literacy. The international dimension of book publishing and the presence or lack of an effective book sector policy have a critical impact on the ability of schools and adult education programmes to transmit reading and writing skills.

III. Learning from international experience with literacy for all

10. The international community is fortunate to have nearly a century of experience in mass literacy promotion on which to base the choices it needs to make in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals as well as the EFA goals. The countries which underwent major political and economic transformations in the first half of the twentieth century accorded high importance to literacy. Those countries undertook integrated mass literacy campaigns along with the rapid expansion of formal education to ensure the widest social participation. They also stressed the importance of promoting national and minority languages in education. International organizations such as UNESCO, in a spirit of optimism, also initially promoted large-scale adult literacy programmes and campaigns alongside the rapid expansion of formal schooling. By the mid-1960s, however, it was clear that neither the political will nor the financial resources were available for such approaches. Thereafter, more targeted and limited adult literacy programmes were supported. Since the late 1970s, a number of countries have engaged in a combination of strategies to promote children's and adult literacy. Few have been supported, however, by multilateral or bilateral assistance in ensuring that their non-formal adult learning programmes are: (a) guaranteed adequate, sustained resources; (b) equivalent to formal school certificates or alternative recognizable quality assurance; and (c) an integral part of multisector strategies or even education sector-wide planning.

11. There is considerable experience in linking literacy skill acquisition with income-generation projects and larger poverty reduction strategies. The experience

gained has not been systematically evaluated, however, with a view to taking the initiative to a larger scale or abandoning an unsuccessful approach. The multitude of donor-driven approaches also works against long-term planning and learning from experience. Community-based approaches also have their strengths and weaknesses. Response to local needs and aspirations is at the heart of relevant formal education and adult literacy programming. Communities are not necessarily democratic or egalitarian, however. The challenge is to ensure that the international community learns from its considerable experience in ensuring that the acquisition of basic literacy skills in both formal and non-formal learning settings actually leads to autonomous literate youth and adults.

12. The international community has the accumulated experience to recognize the necessary conditions for effective literacy acquisition in schools as well as in formal and non-formal adult learning programmes. There is also no doubt that basic reading, writing and numeracy skills are both a human right for all and necessary for further learning. Priority must be given to the most disadvantaged populations within the poorest countries who have remained largely untouched by the fragmented and time-bound nature of international interventions. It is also evident that scarce resources should shift away from unfocused advocacy and awareness-raising regarding isolated "success stories" (which may or may not be replicable in other contexts or which have gone largely unevaluated) towards a much more complex response. The *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006*,[3] a rich source of synthesized research on a wide range of literacy-related issues, stresses that the challenge to meet world literacy needs can only be met by: (a) political leaders at the highest level committing themselves to action; (b) countries adopting explicit literacy policies to expand quality primary and lower secondary education; (c) scaling up of youth and adult literacy programmes; and (d) developing rich literate environments. It states that scaling up literacy programmes requires: active government responsibility for adult literacy policy and financing as part of education sector planning; clear frameworks to coordinate public, private and civil society provision of literacy programmes; increased budgetary and aid allocations; basing programmes on an understanding of learners' demands; curricula that build on these demands, with clearly stated learning objectives and adequate learning materials; adequate pay, professional status and training for literacy educators; and appropriate language policies.

IV. Reviewing United Nations Literacy Decade action around the world

13. In December 2005 and January 2006, the UNESCO Secretariat sent a questionnaire to all National Commissions for UNESCO, 18 bilateral and multilateral organizations, 9 United Nations system agencies, 64 UNESCO field offices, 34 non-governmental organizations, and 4 international and 27 regional United Nations Literacy Decade resource persons. The table below shows the replies received by the date of submission of the present progress report. The questionnaire focused on non-formal youth and adult education for literacy, considering that this is the most neglected form of provision. Thus, although the Literacy Decade is concerned with literacy for all age groups and in all educational settings, the present section of the progress report chiefly addresses non-formal policy, provision and research. The replies and the reporting are divided by topic and region. Because of

the non-exhaustive nature of the questionnaire and the replies received, the present section modestly provides examples of initiatives undertaken and reported. The implementation of ongoing policies, legislation, national frameworks and other long-term commitments are only mentioned occasionally.

Recipients of questionnaire by category	*Quantity of questionnaires sent*	*Quantity of replies received*
Bilaterals/Multilaterals	18	8
United Nations system agencies	9	3
National Commissions/ Delegations of UNESCO	194	32
UNESCO Field Offices and Institutes	64	45
International Resource Persons Team	4	1
Regional Resource Persons Team	27	4
Non-governmental organizations	34	13

A. Policy change

14. While the questionnaire refers to policy change, it was not seen as applicable by all respondents. A sample of reported policy shifts is reviewed here, however. Furthermore, many countries reported overall policy or other measures relating to formal schooling effectiveness and literacy for all age groups, which are included under this heading.

1. Africa

15. Namibia is establishing a National Council on Adult Learning to be put in place in the period 2006-2008 in order to monitor and influence the implementation of a literacy policy framework. A National Committee on the United Nations Literacy Decade operates as a subsection of the EFA Forum. The Namibian Literacy Trust has provided financial and technical support to a number of non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations.

16. Nigeria reported on implementation of its Universal Basic Education Law for all Nigerian adults, youth and children. It reported an increase in funding to basic education by all 37 states and the federal Government. Infrastructure has grown and improved; curricular reviews, teacher education and in-service training have been scaled up; and more community participation in school management and greater community empowerment have been achieved.

2. Arab States

17. The World Economic Forum has included education and literacy specifically in major meetings in 2005 and 2006 in the region. It has also provided the opportunity for increased consultation on the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative in relation to literacy. The Forum has hosted events relating to public/private partnerships for effective school and adult literacy, which led to bilateral business/government projects in three countries.

18. Bahrain is engaged in an evaluation of its education system's efforts during the period 2002-2005 to create more learning opportunities for adult learners, narrow the gender gap and increase enrolment rates in adult programmes. New organizational structures of the Directorate of Continuing Education have emerged to provide a larger scale of learning opportunities.

3. Asia and the Pacific

19. The UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Asia and the Pacific has published an inventory of Literary Decade-related policy developments, activities and programmes.

20. A Strategic Framework of Action for the United Nations Literary Decade in Pakistan has been prepared and disseminated through provincial seminars, a meeting of parliamentarians, media forums and advocacy materials.

21. Mongolia's national programme on literacy education aims to eliminate illiteracy by 2008 and increase the basic education enrolment to 99 per cent by 2012.

4. Europe and North America

22. Canada has addressed literacy issues for all age groups nationally since the 1980s at the federal, provincial and local levels. Literacy policies and strategies are often part of wider documents that address issues of skills training, employment and aboriginal education. The New Brunswick government's policy statement on adult and lifelong learning, entitled "Lifelong Learning: Quality Adult Learning Opportunities", was issued. At the end of 2005, the federal Government presented the report entitled "Towards a Fully Literate Canada: Achieving National Goals through a Comprehensive Pan-Canadian Literacy Strategy".

23. Denmark prepared a national plan for reading in August 2005 as a response to growing concern over the past 10 years. The plan's recommendations include compulsory language screening of all 3-year-old children and improved day-care facilities, with intensive language support. Throughout formal schooling, additional reading support is to be offered. The plan's implementation over the next two years will ensure that literacy is a recurrent issue on all levels in the education system.

24. Lithuania reported on the overall provisions of its National Education Strategy for the period 2003-2012 for all levels and forms of education. Particular attention is being devoted to foreign-born students and other populations with special needs. Priority is given to the prevention of dropout in primary school, the quality of secondary education, and second-chance provisions for those who left primary school and adult education or lifelong learning.

25. Montenegro reported on the general improvement of access to literacy and elementary education programmes in order to increase enrolment and completion rates.

26. The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland's 30 years of national literacy policy experience is regularly reviewed and updated. In December 2005, its National Commission for UNESCO hosted a conference at Oxford University to examine the findings of the *EFA Global Monitoring Report: Literacy for Life, 2006*. The participants — drawn from the British development, literacy and

adult education communities, the Ministry of Education and UNESCO — developed a framework and recommendations for future international literacy policy and capacity-building cooperation, especially within the Europe Region.

27. The United States of America presented the Reading First programme, intended to ensure that every student can read at grade level or above by the end of the third grade (8-9 years of age). Through this programme, states and districts receive support to apply scientifically based reading research to ensure that students become proficient readers. Some 5,200 schools in more than 1,500 school districts now participate in Reading First, reaching more than 2 million students and 100,000 teachers.

5. Latin America and the Caribbean

28. In the framework of the Regional Education Project (PRELAC), the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean focused its action on advocacy for policy change in the area of literacy.

29. A national symposium on literacy and gender was held in St. Lucia to share the results of a large-scale literacy evaluation. The results and the seminar proceedings were published in December 2005 by the St. Lucia National Commission for UNESCO.

30. A meeting on popular education and educational policies in Latin America in the framework of Education for All was held in San Salvador in November 2004, which led in 2005 to a formal agreement being made between the El Salvador Ministry of Education and civil society to work together to promote literacy.

31. Cuba held the First World Congress on Literacy in Havana from 31 January to 4 February 2005; more than 5,000 educators attended the Congress, mostly from Latin American countries but also from Africa and Asia.

32. A South-South Policy Dialogue on Quality Education for Adults and Young People was held in Mexico City, from 15 to 17 June 2005 to provide a platform for the exchange of experience with national planners and policymakers, with participants from all regions.

B. Developing flexible programmes and community participation

33. Although the questionnaire had separate headings for "flexible programmes" and "community participation", many respondents replied interchangeably.

1. Africa

34. UNESCO has been working with the Malagasy Government on the United Nations System Programme for the Promotion of Basic Education for All Malagasy Children. In its mid-course evaluation report of March 2005, it reported particular success in providing literacy to hard-to-reach children with innovative accelerated learning methods and participation incentives, as well as a highly diversified delivery mechanism. UNESCO works with Chad on a programme to promote bilingual basic education (French and Arabic) supported by the Islamic Development Bank since 2004. A similar programme has been developed with the Niger since July 2005.

2. Asia and the Pacific

35. Thailand reports a programme carried out between 2003 and 2005 to promote literacy for those who cannot read and write the Thai language, primarily targeting the elderly, migrant labourers, farmers and prison inmates.

3. Arab States

36. The UNESCO Cairo Office reported the UNILIT (University Students for Literacy) programme in Egypt, the Sudan and Yemen to use university students to offer literacy training for rural girls. Seven literacy centres were opened in Egypt and some 29 centres in the Sudan.

37. A Literacy and Reading Passport has been developed to promote reading skills among both adults and children in Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

4. Europe and North America

38. Croatia has an Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy for Adult Education for 2005, in which one of the components is the Literacy Programme, benefiting some 2,354 people. A new curriculum for adult basic education is under ongoing review. Cyprus has a three-year programme for adolescents between 12 and 15 years of age in secondary education with basic literacy needs. The programme is found to be most effective when families support their children and are in close contact with the schools.

39. Turkey began an initiative in 2004 to reach 7.2 million children and adults with literacy needs. The European Union's Support to Basic Education Programme is assisting Turkey in the preparation of both a First Phase Literacy Programme and a Second Phase Basic Education Programme for Adults. Some 10,000 copies of teachers' guidelines, course books and workbooks were published in the first phase and the second phase was completed in April 2006.

40. Serbia reported a functional basic education programme for the Roma and other marginal groups for the period 2005-2007.

5. Latin America and the Caribbean

41. Brazil's Literate Brazil Programme (Programa Brasil Alfabetizado) aims to achieve educational inclusion by means of effective literacy teaching for young people and adults over 15 years of age. It is structured around a set of agreements with state and municipal governments, non-governmental organizations and other public and private institutions and universities. It began with 1,668,253 beneficiaries in 2003 and has grown to 2,049,059 participants in 2005.

C. Capacity-building

42. A number of countries report their bilateral aid assistance to basic education and literacy under this heading.

43. Austrian development assistance is financing three projects with African partners until September 2006, jointly with the Austrian National Commission for UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the African Academy of Languages in Mali.

These projects assist Africa to address its multilingualism and literacy provision on an ongoing basis.

44. DANIDA (Danish bilateral aid) is supporting educational planning and programmes including literacy in Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Nepal and Nicaragua.

45. German cooperation assistance through the Gesundheit, Bildung, Soziale Sicherheit Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) reported on its assistance to Senegal for this period concerning women's basic education.

46. Japan reported its new programme entitled "Basic Education for Growth Initiative", which started in 2002, as well as its ongoing support for literacy through multilateral channels (including UNESCO) for many years.

47. The Association for the Development of Education in Africa, grouping international organizations and aid agencies along with senior ministry of education officials and the African research community, regularly conducts studies and programmes for capacity-building. Its 2006 biennial meeting reviewed the state of all aspects of education in Africa, with particular attention focused on literacy and primary education.

1. Africa

48. Between January 2004 and March 2006, Kenya has been developing a national qualifications framework based on the integration of education and training into a unified structure of recognized qualifications and skills; the aim is to ensure an integrated system that encourages lifelong learning. UNESCO Nairobi has been supporting a number of stakeholder consultations and workshops to facilitate dialogue on this framework.

49. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, formerly the UNESCO Institute for Education, has been giving particular attention to adult and continuing education in Africa and has worked closely with the Association for the Development of Education in Africa on the biennial meeting. The Institute held a Cross-National Training Workshop on the Evaluation of Non-Formal Education and Literacy Programmes for Youth and Adults in Africa in February 2006.

2. Arab States

50. Kuwait's Department of Adult Education and Literacy in the Ministry of Education reports an initiative to collect data on literacy rates for all ages to create an informed literacy strategy.

51. Lebanon's National Committee for Literacy and Adult Education is implementing national studies for literacy; undertaking curriculum and textbook improvement; training human resources; and disseminating and promoting literacy classes within the social and development centres of the Ministry of Social Affairs. In 2004, the National Committee launched the new curriculum entitled "For a Better Life", for Arabic literacy for working children.

3. Asia and the Pacific

52. The Islamic Republic of Iran reported on efforts to develop literacy activities through the establishment of 60 community learning centres covering 20,000 illiterate people. It also is undertaking efforts to decentralize decision-making about

literacy programmes while ensuring that the most disadvantaged regions are able to improve literacy rates.

53. Mongolia is operating a Literacy through Distance Education Programme to reach 2,300 illiterate persons.

54. Viet Nam reported on a programme entitled "Literacy and Non-formal Education for Poverty Alleviation in the Mekong River Delta". The UNESCO Office in Viet Nam supports the Vietnamese Government to preparing a national policy to expand community-learning centres as a literacy delivery mechanism.

4. Europe and North America

55. France's "Forum permanent des pratiques des intervenants de lutte contre l'illettrisme" (Permanent Forum for Actors in the Struggle against Illiteracy) was put in place by the Agence nationale de lutte contre l'illettrisme (National Agency for the Struggle against Illiteracy). The forum engages in training (initial and in-service) and the exchange of experience to improve the professionalism of literacy provision at all levels; it also engages in international cooperation.

56. Greece reported on adult literacy provided by the Prefectoral Committees for Adult Education. In collaboration with local authorities, courses are offered all over the country. During 2005, some 36 courses were offered to 418 trainees serving the general population. In the same year, 35 courses were offered to 376 trainees for the Roma population.

57. Romania began a "second chance for primary education" initiative in 2005 for young people and adults over 14 years of age who have not graduated from primary school. Thus far, 850 participants have been involved.

5. Latin America and the Caribbean

58. Brazil's Literate Brazil Programme includes provision for training approximately 80,000 literacy workers/educators per year. Cuba's "Yo si puedo" programme has been shared with several Latin American and African countries to promote low-cost, effective literacy provision. The method has been used in Bolivia, Brazil, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Grenada, Guinea-Bissau, Honduras, Mexico, Mozambique, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Paraguay, Peru, South Africa, Timor-Leste and Venezuela. It employs a combination of distance and face-to-face learning.

59. All Latin American countries and Spain participated in the Iberoamerican educational cooperation on youth and adult education conference, held from 26 to 30 September 2005 in Madrid, to survey all national literacy and adult education programmes. A National Encounter of Popular Educators was held in Canelo de Nos, Chile, from 24 to 26 November 2006, to strengthen the administrative capacity of popular education programmes in the country.

D. Research to understand problems

1. Africa

60. Nigeria reported a literacy survey to determine the literacy rate of the states with the highest and lowest literacy rates during the period 2004-2005, with support from the World Bank. The states of Yobe and Lagos were surveyed.

61. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning assisted Botswana in carrying out an evaluation of its National Literacy Programme and is currently assisting in the development of a curriculum framework for a new adult basic education programme.

2. Arab States

62. The UNESCO Cairo Office has conducted a study of the best practices available in Egypt to use information and communications technology for literacy promotion.

3. Asia and the Pacific

63. Thailand reported a research study and bilingual material development for ethnic minorities in Omkoi District, Chiang Mai Province. It plans to expand the bilingual approach to other areas.

64. An assessment of the literacy situation in Bangladesh was conducted in 2005 and its results were discussed at a seminar in May 2006.

65. China is conducting a study on information and communication technology-based illiteracy elimination and technological training in China's western countryside.

4. Europe and North America

66. Canada reported both system-wide and programme research. In 2005, Alberta Education released a report entitled "Aboriginal Education: A Research Brief for Practitioners" to highlight effectives practices for First Nations, Metis and Inuit learner programmes. Over the past two years, the Ministry of Education in Quebec has been undertaking an extensive inventory of research to improve literacy training.

67. The United States reported the Reading and Writing Education Research Program being undertaken by the National Center for Education Research. The long-term outcome of this programme will be an array of tools and strategies for improved reading and writing.

68. Finland reported on a joint study conducted by the Institute for Educational Research and Statistics Canada to understand why Finland outperformed Canada in the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) 2000 and 2003 reading, mathematical and science literacies.

5. Latin America and the Caribbean

69. The UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Latin America and the Caribbean has been coordinating a region-wide research programme on the quality

of learning achievement and supporting training, exchange and capacity-building related to national research institutions.

E. Monitoring and evaluation

1. Africa

70. Kenya reports that it has conducted its National Adult Literacy Survey between April 2004 and June 2006. It is intended to obtain reliable and accurate data to enable the Government to formulate its policy for adult and continuing education, to expand adult education programmes and to effectively integrate the subsector into a national qualifications framework.

71. Lesotho reported a literacy mapping exercise to identify herd boys under the age of 18 and girls who are employed to enrol them in literacy programmes in 10 learning centres during 2005. Learning centres have been opened in four districts, animators have been identified, trained and are on the job.

72. Nigeria reviewed its ongoing monitoring and evaluation of adult and non-formal activities nationwide in collaboration with the Association for the Development of Education in Africa in a peer review of non-formal education. The monitoring has identified enrolment in literacy centres, the number of front line workers in literacy delivery and the dropout rates from literacy centres.

2. Arab States

73. A number of Arab States are putting in place improved monitoring and evaluation of their education systems. None of the reports received, however, refers to specific literacy-related monitoring or the evaluation of existing programmes or policies.

3. Asia and the Pacific

74. The UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Asia and the Pacific has begun to prepare the mid-term regional review of Education for All, which includes primary education and adult literacy. Preparations are being made to include the Literacy Decade component.

4. Europe and North America

75. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation are reported for reading achievement in formal schooling and in national and international surveys of adult literacy (as in the International Adult Literacy Surveys). They are not specifically linked to the Literacy Decade but reference is made in questionnaire replies.

5. Latin America and the Caribbean

76. On the basis of a literacy campaign carried out using the Cuban "Yo puedo si" model, Venezuela has declared that illiteracy has been eliminated in 2005.

77. The Dominican Republic conducted a national survey and seminar on adult illiteracy and strategies for its elimination in 2005.

V. Challenges and the way forward

A. International coordination and cooperation: literacy in a changing United Nations system

78. The present section of the progress report is intended to recall the scale and complexity of the United Nations Literacy Decade in its larger context. The World Summit in September 2005 focused international attention on the reform of the United Nations system. While reaffirming their faith in and commitment to the United Nations and the vital importance of an effective multilateral system, the World Summit recognized the urgent need for change and systemic reform. While much attention was placed on the three areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment, the world's leaders did not neglect education and its vital contribution to poverty eradication and other international goals. The vital link between education and development was acknowledged and reinforced. It remains the role of Literacy Decade partners to make the case even more forcefully that literacy for all age groups is essential for achieving the goals of the global development agenda.

B. International coordination and cooperation: literacy and other United Nations initiatives

79. The major international education-related initiatives comprise: (a) Education for All and the goals adopted in the Dakar Framework for Action for the period 2000-2015; (b) the United Nations Millennium Development Goals; (c) the United Nations Literacy Decade 2003-2012; (d) the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014; (e) the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI); and (f) EDUCAIDS, the Global Initiative on Education and HIV/AIDS. During the reporting period, the EFA movement focused strongly on literacy through the meetings of its Working Group on Education for All, held in Paris in July 2005, and the High-Level Group, held in Beijing in November 2005, and through the publication and dissemination of the *EFA Global Monitoring Report, Literacy for Life, 2006*.[1] This UNESCO-hosted independent publication has also served to mobilize informed literacy debate through launches held in different regions and countries and through discussions in national and international professional education conferences and in policy development circles. The Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, whose secretariat is housed at UNESCO, has also included literacy and basic education for all age groups in its research agenda. EDUCAIDS, meanwhile, has clear links with literacy programming.

80. The next sections of the present progress report look successively at the lead agency's (UNESCO) progress and challenges and then consider reports provided by two other major international agencies.

C. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

81. In addition to its international coordination role for the Literacy Decade, UNESCO is making its own specific contribution to the Decade. That contribution

consists primarily of the recently launched Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), 2005-2015. LIFE will be implemented in 35 countries either with a literacy rate of less than 50 per cent or a population of 10 million or more people who lack basic literacy skills. The Initiative is being rolled out over 10 years in three phases. The following 11 countries have been included in the first implementation phase in 2006: Bangladesh, Egypt, Haiti, Mali, Morocco, the Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, the Sudan and Yemen.

82. The Initiative's immediate objectives are fourfold: to reinforce national and international commitment to literacy through advocacy and communication; to support the integration of policies for sustainable literacy within sector-wide approaches and national development frameworks; to strengthen national capacities for programme design, management and implementation; and to enhance countries' innovative initiatives and practices in providing literacy learning opportunities.

83. The immense task of contributing to the achievement of the LIFE objectives in 35 countries calls for well-coordinated partnerships and concerted efforts both at national and international levels. The Initiative will promote partnerships with Governments, civil society, universities, institutes, the donor community, international organizations and the private sector. Experience will be widely shared through existing networks and South-South cooperation.

84. The critical factor for the success of LIFE is the cooperation of the Governments of the participating countries. They remain responsible for national literacy policy, legislation and domestic resource mobilization.

D. Advocating for literacy

1. United Nations Literacy Decade Honorary Ambassador, the First Lady of the United States

85. Mrs. Laura Bush, the First Lady of the United States, was designated the Honorary Ambassador for the United Nations Literacy Decade in 2003 in recognition of her dedication to learning and the promotion of reading, her commitment to universal education and literacy, her work on behalf of libraries and the sharing of knowledge, and her efforts in support of teachers and the teaching profession. A teacher and librarian by training, Mrs. Bush has been promoting education for many years, especially emphasizing the importance of preparing young children to learn to read. She is an outspoken advocate for women's education and for improved learning opportunities for children and adults worldwide. In her role as Honorary Ambassador, she also supports LIFE and calls upon Governments to make education their first priority.

86. In April 2006, Mrs. Bush announced that she will convene a White House Conference on Global Literacy to take place in New York City in September 2006, prior to the opening of the sixty-first session of the United Nations General Assembly. In cooperation with the United States Departments of Education and State, the United States Agency for International Development and UNESCO, the Conference will be looking at effective literacy programmes and connecting countries with the information they need to implement similar programmes. The Conference will also encourage world leaders to become involved in literacy in their

own countries, thereby implementing strategies that support the international goal of Education for All by 2015.

2. UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, Her Royal Highness the Grand Duchess Maria Teresa of Luxembourg

87. Her Royal Highness the Grand Duchess Maria Teresa of Luxembourg has been a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador since 1997 with a special interest in microfinance and the education of girls and women the world over. She fosters efforts contributing to their empowerment and helping them to defend their rights. In this way, Her Royal Highness lends her support to projects such as microcredit grants for the improvement of the living conditions of women and their families. Particularly interested in the rights and the development of children, she is actively involved in helping street children. Another major concern of Her Royal Highness is the fight against juvenile prostitution and human trafficking.

88. Her Royal Highness the Grand Duchess Maria Teresa contributed to the UNESCO project entitled "Breaking the Poverty Cycle of Women: Empowering Adolescent Girls to Become Agents of Social Transformation", which benefits adolescent girls in Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Pakistan. About 4,500 adolescent girls have benefited from the project since 2003.

3. UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, Her Royal Highness the Princess of Hanover

89. Her Royal Highness the Princess of Hanover was designated UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador in 2003 in recognition of her personal commitment to the protection of children and the family and her contribution to the promotion of UNESCO programmes for basic education. Since 2004, she has contributed to the UNESCO project entitled "Strengthening Women's Capacities to Promote Education for Children in Rural Areas in Burkina Faso and the Niger", which aims at realizing the goals of the Education for All initiative to ensure women's autonomy and children's education. The project promotes school enrolment and women's autonomy and combines technical services for early childhood care, health care and education.

E. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

90. The United Nations Children's Fund has a longstanding commitment to basic education and literacy for children and women, especially since the World Conference on Education for All in 1990. UNICEF considers that one of the most powerful ways to reduce illiteracy in countries is by expanding and improving primary education. In addition to the Literacy Decade and EFA goals and the World Fit for Children goals, UNICEF strongly supports two Millennium Development Goals: (i) universal primary education; and (ii) gender parity and equality in education. These goals form the basis for UNICEF interventions in education.

91. UNICEF provides broad-based support to literacy at country level that varies by region, type of assistance and target groups. The largest number of UNICEF country offices reporting on literacy are to be found in the eastern and southern Africa region, followed by the Middle East and North Africa and then by west and central Africa. Four countries reported in East Asia and the Pacific, four in South Asia and one in central and eastern Europe/the Commonwealth of Independent

States. Reports on initiatives from the Americas region include the Caribbean. In the latter countries, the focus of literacy is to a large extent on early childhood development programmes and young people.

92. Literacy interventions in school-based and non-formal education settings target children, adolescents, young people and adults. UNICEF provides technical and financial support in most cases, often locally recruited, aimed at enhancing policy support, lessons learned and good practice. For example, in Afghanistan, United Nations system agencies jointly support national priorities outlined in the country's National Development Strategy. Jointly, UNESCO and UNICEF support the Afghan Integrated Functional Literacy Initiatives. The programme provides literacy classes for some 30,000 women, including some 990 illiterate women in the insecure southern region; 33 adult learning centres with courses for 19,000 women are planned in 2006. The role of literacy and non-formal education in preventing and mitigating the effects of HIV and AIDS is sometimes a focus in UNICEF-supported literacy programmes. It supports a number of microfinance programmes with literacy components to help reduce poverty and empower people.

F. International Labour Organization (ILO)

93. The International Labour Organization considers that basic education provides youth and adults with the basic skills required for the development of their full capacity to live and work in conditions of freedom, dignity, economic security and equity. ILO contributes to addressing the challenge of the EFA and Literacy Decade goals and the Millennium Development Goals with a view of enhancing employability and improving the well-being of millions of workers. Literacy is a fundamental skill for a person to be able to interact at work and within a community. ILO considers that literacy training works better if embedded in livelihood programmes. Also, ILO has long been involved in the development of functional literacy as part of vocational training and enterprise development programmes, promotion of gender equality in the world of work and other employment promotion-related initiatives, especially those targeting economically vulnerable and socially excluded groups.

G. United Nations Literacy Decade international coordination: strengthening the commitment

94. UNESCO has been called upon by the United Nations General Assembly as well as by its own governing bodies to strengthen its Literacy Decade international coordination and leadership in effectively promoting sustained literacy provision for all age groups. Thus, UNESCO is strengthening its role in state-of-the-art literacy services. Education for All, the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development and the Literacy Decade will be better integrated and linked to the Millennium Development Goals and other international development agendas, especially but not only those with education goals.

95. Further, UNESCO will continue to ensure that its "Literacy Portal" provides the widest coverage of literacy issues and actors. UNESCO is also responsible for organizing the award of several annual international literacy prizes: the UNESCO International Reading Association Literacy Award (since 1979); the two UNESCO

King Sejong Literacy Prizes (since 1989 by the Government of the Republic of Korea), and the newly created UNESCO Confucius Literacy Prize (offered by China in 2005). The celebration of 8 September as International Literacy Day is often the occasion for the presentation of the laureates of the international literacy prizes and will continue to provide important advocacy for literacy.

VI. Gauging commitment and progress: conclusions and recommendations

96. **Almost four years have passed since the United Nations Literacy Decade was launched. Its effectiveness worldwide shall be examined through a mid-Decade assessment. Decade progress should be measured in terms of the four expected outcomes set: (1) significant progress towards EFA goals 3, 4 and 5 by 2015; (2) attainment by all learners of a mastery level of literacy; (3) creation of dynamic literate environments; and (4) improved quality of life of learners. The UNESCO Secretariat is actively exploring the means to coordinate that mid-Decade assessment with others, such as the progress review for Education for All, in order to engage in a more coherent and less onerous process for Member States. The Asia and the Pacific region is already reporting an EFA progress review which may be linked to the mid-Decade assessment of the Literacy Decade.**

97. **In fact, national as well as international research into and monitoring of educational progress, achievement and measurement of literacy is ongoing. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the *EFA Global Monitoring Report* are engaged in improving the measurement of education enrolment and retention, school quality, learning achievement and more context-specific youth and adult literacy skills and competencies. Furthermore, UIS is piloting the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Project, an adaptation of the International Adult Literacy Survey used to measure literacy competencies in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development countries, for use in developing country assessments. The advantages and disadvantages of different assessment techniques are also being studied so that countries can make informed decisions about the costs and benefits of standardized assessment methods beyond the traditional self-reporting of literacy skills in the national census.**

98. **Nonetheless, the achievement of Literacy for All will only be possible through integrated and comprehensive education policy, planning and quality provision linking up formal, non-formal and informal education. Success will also depend upon the degree to which all stakeholders collectively work together and on their sustained political and financial commitment. Evidence-based research and more precise and reliable data are needed. The recommendations to be made for the present second biennial progress report largely reiterate earlier ones. Commitments need to be sustained, reinforced and translated into practical action.**

Recommendations

99. **Efforts by all United Nations Literacy Decade stakeholders should continue and be strengthened. To encourage such actions, this second biennial progress report suggests that:**

(a) **Member States should increase their political commitment and financial support to addressing literacy challenges and to achieving the Literacy Decade goals, in the knowledge that the lack of such commitment and support is directly and indirectly having a negative impact on development as a whole, and more specifically on socio-economic growth and poverty eradication;**

(b) **Member States should make further efforts to enhance partnership with all domestic and international Literacy Decade stakeholders. To that end, Member States should develop and implement integrated education policies and programmes giving priority to literacy throughout formal and non-formal education;**

(c) **The international community should increase financial and technical support to enable Member States to attain the four expected outcomes set down in the Literacy Decade and its International Plan of Action. This support should be aligned with other international and country-led initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals, Education for All, the EFA Fast-Track Initiative, UNGEI, LIFE and EDUCAIDS, as well as with regional processes such as conferences of ministers of education held in each region;**

(d) **The international community should reinforce UNLD advocacy by capitalizing on the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report, Literacy for Life, 2006*, the Final Communiqué of the fifth EFA High-Level Group meeting, held in Beijing in November 2005, and the Monterrey Declaration made at the sixth E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting, held in February 2006;**

(e) **UNESCO should enhance its role in coordinating and catalysing Literacy Decade action at international level. As the lead coordinating agency, UNESCO should prepare and conduct the mid-Decade review in collaboration with all Literacy Decade partners during 2007 and 2008, the results of which should be submitted to the United Nations General Assembly in September 2008.**

Table 1

Estimated number of adult illiterates (population age 15 and over) 1990, 2000 and 2015
UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), April 2006

	1990		2000-2004		2015		Percentage change	
	Total (millions)	Percentage females	Total (millions)	Percentage females	Total (millions)	Percentage females	1990-2000	2000-2015
World	874	63.1	771	64.5	684	64.7	-10.6	-12.5
Developed countries	15	64.0	10	62.4	9	75.4	-33.3	-5.9
Countries in transition	2	72.7	1	75.7	1	60.9	-23.7	-55.5
Developing countries	857	63.0	770	64.0	674	64.5	-10.2	-12.5
Arab States	64	63.0	58	66.5	55	67.4	-9.2	-4.7
Central and Eastern Europe	11	74.9	9	78.9	7	78.1	-18.9	-26.3
Central Asia	1	78.8	0	72.5	0	58.0	-32.8	-40.4
East Asia and the Pacific	233	69.1	125	70.7	81	70.6	-46.1	-35.6
East Asia			124	70.9	79	71.0		-36.2
The Pacific			2	56.8	2	53.6		-16.1
Latin America and the Caribbean	42	56.6	39	55.0	26	54.1	-7.8	-32.0
Caribbean			3	51.5	1	46.1		-65.0
Latin America			36	55.3	25	54.5		-29.3
North America and Western Europe	13	63.6	7	60.6	2	63.0	-36.8	-66.1
South and West Asia	380	60.5	399	63.4	345	66.0	5.0	-13.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	133	60.8	144	61.1	168	59.2	8.5	16.8

Table 2

Estimated adult literacy rate (population age 15 and over) by gender, 1990, 2000 and 2015
UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), April 2006

	Adult literacy rates (percentage)								
	1990			*2000–2004*			*2015*		
	Total	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*	*Male*	*Female*
World	75.4	81.8	69.1	82.1	87.1	77.1	87.2	90.9	83.5
Developed countries	98.0	98.5	97.5	99.4	99.7	99.2	99.1	99.5	98.7
Countries in transition	99.2	99.6	98.8	98.8	99.0	98.5	99.7	99.7	99.7
Developing countries	67.0	75.9	57.9	76.8	83.5	70.1	83.6	88.4	78.8
Arab States	50.0	63.7	35.6	66.4	77.0	55.3	78.5	86.3	70.5
Central and Eastern Europe	96.2	98.0	94.6	97.2	98.7	95.8	97.9	99.0	96.9
Central Asia	98.7	99.4	98.0	99.3	99.6	99.0	99.6	99.7	99.6
East Asia and the Pacific	81.8	88.9	74.5	91.7	95.2	88.2	95.5	97.3	93.6
East Asia				91.7	95.2	88.1	95.5	97.3	93.6
The Pacific				93.3	94.2	92.5	93.4	93.8	93.1
Latin America and the Caribbean	85.0	86.7	83.3	89.7	90.5	89.0	94.3	94.6	94.0
Caribbean				70.1	70.1	70.2	96.7	96.5	97.1
Latin America				90.3	91.1	89.5	94.2	94.6	93.9
North America and Western Europe	97.9	98.4	97.4	98.8	99.0	98.5	99.6	99.7	99.5
South and West Asia	47.5	59.7	34.4	58.7	70.5	46.3	68.1	78.2	57.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	49.9	60.0	40.3	61.2	69.5	53.3	67.3	73.3	61.3

Table 3

Nine countries with high illiteracy: trends and projections to 2015
UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), April 2006

	Adult literacy rates					Adult illiterates				
	(Percentages)			Percentage changes		(Millions)			Percentage changes	
	1990	2000-2004	2015	1990-2000	2000-2015	1990	2000-2004	2015	1990-2000	2000-2015
Bangladesh	34.2					40				
Brazil	82.0	88.6	93.7	8.0	5.7	17	15	10	-13.3	-34.6
China	78.3	90.9	95.7	16.1	5.3	181	87	49	-52.0	-43.9
Egypt	47.1	71.4	76.0	51.6	6.4	17	14	15	-18.4	2.2
Ethiopia	28.6					20				
India	49.3	61.0	69.7	23.7	14.2	273	268	275	-1.7	2.4
Indonesia	79.5	90.4	95.2	13.7	5.4	24	15	9	-36.5	-41.7
Nigeria	48.7					25				
Pakistan	35.4	49.9	61.2	40.9	22.9	41	49	49	19.6	1.2